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DEVELOPMENT OF THE EASTERN SECTION AND THE POLICY  
OF THE LAND OWNERS

REMARKS BY ALLEN C. CLARK.

As to the jealous “trifles light as air” are confirmations strong, so to the antiquarian incidents are events; events, epochs. The antiquarian’s ambition that nothing shall perish which would profit posterity is a laudable one, and if he happens in his zeal to magnify, surely he is not beyond grace. So much is an intimation, I fear I may be charged with triviality.

The first words of the first report, March 26, 1791, of L’Enfant are: “After coming upon the hill from the Eastern Branch ferry, the country is level and on a space of about two miles each way present a most eligible position for the first settlement of a grand City”; he supplements a comparison—if not the most advantageous in the limits of the Federal territory, at least, in that part between the Eastern Branch and Georgetown.

L’Enfant decided the east end the best adapted to mercantile pursuit. He indicated on his map that East Capitol Street should be an avenue of bazaars; that each side should be an arched way with shops, conveniently and agreeably situated.

L’Enfant decided the Eastern Branch the better adapted to commerce. He reports it preferable to the Potomac as less liable to the impeding of ice and the swelling of freshets, and that its channel is deeper and closer to shore. This was the consensus of opinion of the travellers. Weld says:

“Thousands of vessels might lie here, and sheltered from all danger, arising either from freshets, or from ice upon the breaking up of a severe winter.”

L'Enfant on the map provided the entire city front of the Branch with wharves and shipping facility.

The historian likened to an artist of the brush and pencil might from all that is contemporary derive the detail, which sometime dovetail, for pictures presenting a progressive panorama of the formative time—the plantations, the mansions near the water and the road that skirts; open spaces and stumps through the waste and wilderness, the new streets; a mansion here and there, built and being built; even the actors in the first scene, all strong characters, their careers and their characteristics.

Plats of the plantations and outlines of their mansions and appurtenant buildings are preserved. Charles Carroll, the father of Daniel Carroll of Duddington, had his mansion on the bank of the Eastern Branch due south of the site of the Congress house; William Prout's home site is within the enclosure of the Navy Yard; the three Youngs had the eastern front, Elizabeth (Wheeler) and her brother, William, had their dwellings where is the Congressional Cemetery, their brother, Abraham, had his where Fifteenth and D Streets, northeast, intersect. Their road, which connected two ferries, is traceable even at this day. Elizabeth, the widow Wheeler, plied the south ferry; she was the ferryman. The plantation acquired afterwards by George Walker had its house near Maryland Avenue and Sixth Street, northeast.

Samuel Blodget was speculator number one. Mr. Bryan said "Blodget was very much a man." Indeed he was. Of cultured family, of extensive experience, of varied learning, he, too, was an author and had as much originality in his style as in his schemes. His "Economica: A Statistical Manual of the United States," is a comprehensive compilation of present

utility and the copy of the Library of Congress has been in the use of the Coast and Geodetic Survey for a period. Another work, "Thoughts on the Increasing Wealth of the United States," was also printed in Washington. These are of the earliest publications. It was Blodget's conception to discharge the public debt by a multiplication of the population; that is, the more the people, the less to each person; if the people can be sufficiently increased the proportion to each one will be exceedingly slight; in fact, not worth mentioning, and why mention it. It was not the origination of Blodget, it was of Dr. Adam Smith in his "Wealth of Nations," but Blodget accepted it, that is, to measure the commercial prosperity of a country by the demand for widows. Let me give it to you exact:

"A young widow (in the middle and back country) with four or five young children, who among the middling or inferior ranks of people in Europe would have so little chance for a second husband, is there frequently courted as a fort of fortune."

Mr. Blodget had a surcharge of faith in his country "selected by an indulgent providence to become hereafter *The Greatest and Most Powerful Nation of the Universe.*" In flamboyant rhetoric and spread type his exaltations in comparison make the flourishes of the imperialist insipid. Our progressive country is far in the rear of Blodget's prophecy and it is going to be more industrious to catch up, for he accepted Dr. Franklin's estimate that the people in 1896 would number one hundred and sixty million.

In Philadelphia Dr. Thornton and Mr. Blodget were amateur architects. Its most authentic history appears to give Blodget the precedence; it says he drew the plan of the Bank of the United States, and upon its

completion he drew upon himself the panegyrics of the public prints; one saw a remarkable resemblance with the Roman temple at Nismes and another saw a close copy of the Dublin Exchange.

In Washington, Thornton and Blodget were associated in a friendly way and in a financial way. Blodget built Thornton's residence which the latter afterwards acquired. I do not know that Blodget collaborated with Thornton in the Capitol design; he certainly was consulted. Blodget was the Superintendent of Public Buildings.

Of Blodget's lottery schemes, Gen. Washington foretold they "will be more productive of thorns than roses." As early as November 21, 1791, Jefferson submitted to the Commissioners Blodget's scheme to build an entire street. The Commissioners granted it October 10, 1792. Washington deprecated the concession; he need not have. The mansions were of the skies and being air-built had no need of earthly foundations and had none. The square is 688; now the southeast angle of the Capitol Park. It was the east end's initial enterprise. It had no ending as it had no beginning.

In the east end of the Federal City the first house built was Casanovia, still standing within the lines and at the northern beginning of Delaware Avenue. It was built in 1791 by Peter Casanove, a merchant of Georgetown, who married Ann, a daughter of the proprietor, Notley Young. The second was Duddington, the mansion of Daniel Carroll of Duddington, near New Jersey Avenue, southeast (Square 736), built in 1792 or 1793.

Thomas Law, scion of a noble English family, brother of Lord Ellenborough and of eminent ecclesiastics, had in a princely position in India amassed a

fortune. He and Captain William Mayne Duncanson crossed the Atlantic in company. In New York, Law met Greenleaf, to whom he advanced a considerable sum with Washington City lots as security and an option to receive them in payment. Law with Duncanson visited the Federal City and greatly enthused over its prospects.

Mr. Law and Miss Eliza Parke Custis, Mrs. Washington's granddaughter, became attuned in spirit to the same harmony and were consecrated to each other. Mr. Law hired the mansion on Greenleaf Point, where the honeymoon was celebrated. Mr. Thomas Twining, a young Englishman in the employ of the East India Company, made a touring vacation. He was invited to tarry with Mr. and Mrs. Law. From Georgetown, on horseback, he had reached the Capitol. He says:

"Looking from where I now stood I saw on every side a thick wood pierced with avenues in a more or less perfect state. These denoted the lines of the intended streets, which already appeared in the engraved plan with their future names. The Capitol promised to be a large and handsome building, judging from the part, about two thirds, already above the ground. I walked through several of the lower apartments, and saw the halls designed for the representatives and senate, now in an unfinished state, and encumbered with building materials. I did not go into the tavern. It was a large building of red brick, and in a much more advanced state than the Capitol, being roofed in."

Giving to each circumstance its just proportion, it is more of confidence than conjecture the claim that the tavern was the north two houses of Carroll's Row on First Street, where is the Library of Congress. Twining's observation was April 27, 1796. September 10 Elizabeth Leslie announced in the *Washington*

*Gazette* the opening of the Capitol Hill Tavern, where "any number of persons may be accommodated" and that "a Shuffle Board and Nine Pin Alley are ready for those inclined to amuse themselves." These two structures, afterwards known as Stelle's Hotel, were of ample width and depth, and the only ones known which could have had the facilities described in the advertisement. The four dwellings of the row southward were not completed until 1800.

Mr. Law principally improved New Jersey Avenue from the Capitol to the Potomac. He built the range of three, now The Varnum, the opposite mansion where Judge Holt lived and the range below designated Ten Buildings. Mr. Law, September, 1796, had moved to the north house of the Varnum; afterwards he made the Holt house his home.

Mr. Law was himself the original East Washington Citizens' Association and he could detect discrimination in favor of the west end plainly enough, for he stood always on the watch-tower. Here is what he says:

"The legislature of Maryland had started a bank for the city, but it was established in George Town and the money loaned was to those who would build in the Town or at the west end of the city. A bridge was built also by the Commissioners at the city expense over Rock Creek with a draw, and it was to have the Navy Yard there and the Marine barracks were laid on its banks and the marine corps encamped there.

"The President's house was advanced rapidly and the Capitol was only above ground and the foundation was so bad that it was to be undone and commenced again. In short Mr. Stoddert, Secretary of Navy, and the majority of the Commissioners and the bank being George Town men, resolved to have Congress meet in the President's house or

in George Town College and to make the progress of the west end tend to counteract that of the Capitol.

"General Washington having been informed of these injurious ideas in the Commissioners and being displeased at witnessing the slow advancement of the Capitol ordered the Commissioners to live in the city and to encourage persons to build for the accommodation of Congress.

"That the public might have encouragement to build General Washington commenced two houses. This example gave confidence and houses were seen to spring up with rapidity, notwithstanding the natural rivalry of two adjacent towns, which had been long before established. New Jersey Avenue, then full of stumps of trees was opened to have access to the Eastern Branch, and merchants made wharves and warehouses. \* \* \* Houses also rapidly sprang up about the Capitol although double prices were paid for workmen, bricks and materials."

Law was an effective champion for the east end. He had influence with the influential; he was a writer, and his writings were not all flash and froth. This Law had wit and he had eccentricity and so intermingled as to make applicable to himself Dryden's lines:

"Great wit to madness sure is near ally'd,  
And thin partitions do their bounds divide."

Eastward from the Capitol and in the wilds, William Mayne Duncanson selected the spot for his mansion. It is on an eminence and faces the Anacostia. The captain was a land captain, but he ventured the fortunes of the sea. And like to all mariners, the firm land gives a longing for the sea, always quit too soon. From the circular window in the Grecian pediment and from all the windows southward he could see the sheen of the water, the coming and the going of the craft. The culture of the captain is indicated in the mansion



and the tree-embowered driveway and his affluence in the provision for his equipage. The mansion and its grounds, an ample square (875), is as it was. Here lived the captain and the captain's sister, Miss Martha Duncanson. And if her spirit shone outwardly, she was good to see. Robert Morris mentions her in an admiring way. The brave captain, as second for Miss Martha, challenged Mr. Morris, as second for his daughter, Maria, for a foot-race through Pennsylvania Avenue. Connected with the mansion the four years the captain lived in it is incident, scheme and treachery sufficient for several novels.

Farther eastward, the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and Ninth Street, was Tunnicliff's Tavern, the Eastern Branch Hotel, opened December 14, 1796. The permanents were sparse and the transients infrequent, so he resorted to trade, and as an adjunct to the hostelry conducted a haberdashery and advertised "fleecy hosiery" and the such like. The hotel keeper had another help; he had a wife of magnetic quality.

Across the way from Tunnicliff's was Lewis Debois' store. That is replaced by the Marine Hospital.

George Walker was a Scot. He came from Philadelphia about the time that Blodget did and evinced his enthusiasm in the purchase of a great tract extending from the Branch all the way across Capitol Hill. He married a belle of Upper Marlboro, but was soon a widower. He built a store near the Capitol just in the rear of where was the Old Capitol Prison and stocked it. Mr. Walker would saunter over to the captain's. Perhaps Miss Duncanson had nothing to do with his calls; perhaps it was to consult the captain concerning his grievances with the commissioners and draw inspiration from the captain's sword hung upon the wall. Hardly that, for he had sufficient of the spirit of Mars

for a battalion. He was born at Falkirk, built upon the heights. He was not yet five years of age when he heard the wailing pibrochs and saw the flashing claymores of the invading horde of kilted Highlanders in the narrow streets of Falkirk. Always he could see the plain below where Wallace, the champion of Scotland, held high its standard. Always he could in another view see the wall, scene of sanguinary struggles, the Caledonian and Roman wall which silently warned—thus far and no farther. To Walker war had been a continuous story and it came easy for him to write to the commissioners:

“Notwithstanding the haughty and arrogant manner with which you affect to treat the original proprietors of the east end of the city you will please to recollect that you and even your master the President, are only public servants, bound by certain limits, which will be found too strong for you to break through.”

Persistently appear descriptions in the public prints of the oldest mansion built by a planter in the reign of Queen Anne, two hundred years and more ago. A casual look at the Duncanson structures will convince their placing is in accord with the city plan; a part are on the building line, exactly. However, in the chancery cause, Ray against Duncanson, is the account of the architect and builder, William Lovering, in pounds, shillings and pence.

The opening of a street destroyed Abraham Young's dwelling. He built a more pretentious one on the county side of Fifteenth Street. It stands to-day. Its history, or rather a sketch of Abraham's widow, would take a paper, and it would be not without humor. She bothered not with the law's summonses to appear; she did not seem to comprehend notices to quit and so

she stayed and stayed; she was defendant in a chancery bill, the complainant exhausted, died and the bill abated until his heirs were substituted; the lawyers in the first instance died and others stood in their stead; but the widow, she stayed and stayed; she married again and the daughter of the second venture was given in marriage and the son grew to manhood in that very same house.

Twenty Building Hill, they dubbed it. The emittance was so styled after the contract between Daniel Carroll of Duddington and James Greenleaf, the latter representing the syndicate, Morris, Nicholson and Greenleaf. Carroll was to contribute twenty lots and Greenleaf was to build twenty houses, within three years from the date of the contract, September 26, 1793. Morris and Nicholson inherited the building obligation, and being convinced of Carroll's stubbornness and severity, three months before the time limit began operations and pursued them with utmost expedition. Each independently undertook fifteen houses.

The forenoon of the last day, the nail was driven which made all covered in. At once a grand barbecue was held. Right in front of the structures, in the middle of South Capitol Street, improvised tables of sheathing extended, along which the guests disposed themselves, the hosts, Mr. Morris and Mr. Nicholson, at the head. Mr. William Prentiss, Nicholson's builder, had received instruction what to do and the wherewithal to do it, and that means much, for Morris's "luxury was not to be outdone by any commercial voluptuary of London" and "was to be found nowhere else in America." The guests were two hundred and more; prominent people, but more the knights of the crafts, and especially those whose handiwork was in view.

Robert Morris, the financier of the American Revolution, was all but six foot, stout and ruddy. His gray hair hung long and loose; his gray eyes twinkled like small stars; and gray was his suit to match. When, this eventful day, September 26, 1796, he arose and cleared his throat, his grandeur of stature and strength impressed silence; when he proceeded in his usual vein, for he was an expert jollier, his audience broke into responsive mirth; when he turned sharply to the serious, his audience was quickly in the same spirit, and when he climbed the climax, even if the prominent citizens were too dignified to applaud save by clapping, I am inclined to think the artisans tossed their caps into the air.

I said the houses were covered in; only four were completed, the others were in various stages of construction. Nothing more was done by Morris or Nicholson on Twenty Building Hill and little else by them anywhere, for they had exhausted every expediency in financeering. Morris and Nicholson were close friends and closer still as their distress deepened. When not talking to each other they were so writing. However, Nicholson never wrote more than eleven letters to Morris in one day.

Morris must have thought of his unfinished buildings perched upon the promontory when he read Luke xvi: 28, 29, 30:

“For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?

“Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him;

“Saying this man began to build, and was not able to finish it.”

Mr. Morris, impressed with the scriptural lesson, decided it his duty to impart it to his co-unfortunate, John Nicholson. Mr. Morris with a preface "as I have not the Scripture at my Finger Ends I will not attempt to imitate the stile in which you excell" writes, November 20, 1796:

"For he telleth stories against John the manufacturer, who undertaketh to build Houses and leaveth them unbuilt, even altho' he hath promised to raise them unto the third story and put a roof thereon—Still they do not rise above the Surface of the Earth but various and numerous are the Tales and Traditions against not only John but Robert—Know thou these men."

Mr. Carroll seized the houses. He did nothing to preserve them. Ere long their aspect was desolation and dilapidation. From their elevation they could not be overlooked and they were not by the wits at home and abroad. From a description in the *Commercial Advertiser*, 1824, I cull:

"On a knowl south of Capitol Hill stands an object of peculiar dreariness; it is a row of twenty brick buildings; \* \* \* There they stand, with roofs sunk in and grass growing in the windows looking as if they had been bombarded by the British. One of them has a family in it, but the inmates look like Arabs among the ruins of Balbec."

Morris and Nicholson tendered, February 16, 1796, to Carroll eight thousand dollars on account of the land purchase if he would concede one year on the building contract. Carroll refused by word and reiterated in writing. Greenleaf, who succeeded to the management of the syndicate affairs, after an overture, pursued its rights to the tribunal of highest resort, and Carroll was defeated. His obstinacy cost him fifty thousand dollars.

It is a tradition that Carroll's cupidity retarded the growth of the east end. No circumstance indicates that he did not accord with the other large holders. They thought they had enough and to spare and of their El Dorado evinced a spirit to share, seemingly self-sacrificing. In the vicinity of the Capitol, Carroll and Law were about equal owners. Richard Parkinson took note of an offer in 1797; says he in his "Tour in America": Mr. Law "offered to let Mr. Lyles and me have any lot we choose, at the price it cost him, and leave the money on common interest for any time we should mention." Morris and Nicholson had more lots than all; they had them in nearly every square. This is what Morris writes to

*"His Excellency*

*"GEO. WASHINGTON ESQ*

"No body can suppose that Mr. Nicholson or myself entered into these engagements with an expectation of holding the property. It was from the beginning & is now our intention to resell when it can be done to our satisfaction & I believe the interest of the City will be more certainly promoted by interesting a number of Individuals, than by one or two men, continuing to hold a large number of Lotts."

The letter's date is September 21, 1795. By 1800 the proprietors were all in a line with their offerings in the columns of the *Intelligencer*, each of his generosity trying to outboast the other. The reason they did not advertise before was there was no paper to advertise in. I have no notion that Carroll asked prohibitive prices; even if he did, his action could not have obstructed the development. There was a superabundance of vacancy. Carroll was a good citizen; his fellow-citizens gave recognition of his worth by their suffrages. He built substantially. In three squares

(686, 687 and 729) adjoining the Capitol, in the first assessment for taxation, his buildings are appraised at sixty-two thousand dollars.

In my youth when my companions and myself passed a particular part of the most eastern extremity we did so with bated breath and stealthy step for fear we might cause to ignite the powder in the magazine and there would be visitors in the skies. Where the magazine is marked on the map and where are the almshouse and paupers' field, was a public garden established by Theodore Holt in 1797 and continued by him until his death in or about 1812. A garden of green delight it was, primeval trees of the forest, spaces cleared of the tangle of undergrowth, picturesque nooks and winding paths, vistas and views of the shining waters of the Anacostia toward which the land gently inclined. To the first inhabitants it was a retreat where they repaired for recreation in leisure and in pastime.

The sugar refinery promoted by Mr. Law was at the foot of New Jersey Avenue, on the west side of the canal basin. The "Sugar House," as it was commonly called, was forty-seven feet by forty-six, the main building eight stories, the wing, five. Mr. James Piercy, the proprietor, began to boil sugar in the summer of 1798. The enterprise was an enormous failure. The building towered "proudly eminent" half a century.

Mr. James Barry, who, like Mr. Law, had lived in India, was located in Baltimore. He engaged extensively in merchant marine. He and Law were soon associated in various ventures. Law, July 4, 1795, writes:

"Barry is urgent—he wants to erect a store there & to purchase grain & to build a ship—I mean to set up an

agency house with him for East India commissions in short I wish to benefit myself by promoting the City."

Barry came to the Capitol City. His wharf was on the eastern side of the canal basin. From Barry's wharf sailed, April, 1797, the ship *Maryland*, burthen four hundred tons, laden with bread and flour—the first bound for a foreign port.

Mr. Gallatin to Mrs. Gallatin writes:

WASHINGTON CITY, 15th January, 1801.

"Our local situation is far from being pleasant or even convenient. Around the Capitol are seven or eight boarding-houses, one tailor, one shoemaker, one printer, a washing-woman, a grocery shop, a pamphlets and stationery shop, a small dry-goods shop, and an oyster house. This makes the whole of the Federal city as connected with the Capitol. At the distance of three-fourths of a mile, on or near the Eastern Branch, lie scattered the habitations of Mr. Law and of Mr. Carroll, the principal proprietaries of the ground, half a dozen houses, a very large but perfectly empty warehouse, and a wharf graced by not a single vessel. And this makes the whole intended commercial part of the city, unless we include in it what is called the Twenty Buildings, being so many unfinished houses commenced by Morris and Nicholson, and perhaps as many undertaken by Greenleaf, both which groups lie, at the distance of half-mile from each other, near the mouth of the Eastern Branch and the Potowmack, and are divided by a large swamp from the Capitol Hill and the little village connected with it."

Mr. Gallatin does not mention the small settlement farther east near Tunnicliff's Hotel and thence southward to the Navy Yard. The official census of the east end buildings, May 15, 1800, is: Finished 76 brick and 149 wood houses; unfinished 14 brick and 13 wood houses; this is, exclusive of the houses on Twenty Building Hill.



“When found, make a note of.” I have taken Captain Cuttle’s advice once, to leaven the whole, for whoever told anything more charmingly than William Wirt? Wirt was born and bred in Bladensburg and here is what he says:

“Next comes that wonder of childhood, the Wire Dancer, with his balancings and other accomplishments. \* \* \* This was Mr. Templeman, a dancer on the slackwire. The exhibition was in Tattison’s dancing room. We got there at early candle light. The room was brilliantly lighted. A large wire fastened at each end of the room, near the ceiling, hung in a curve, the middle of it within twelve or fifteen inches of the floor. I remember the pouring in of the company till the room was filled, as the phrase is, ‘with all the beauty and fashion of the place.’ Still better do I remember, after a note of preparation from another room, which bespoke and commanded silence, the entrée of Templeman—a tall man, superbly attired in a fanciful dress; of a military air, with a drum hung over his shoulder by a scarlet scarf. It was such a picture as I had never seen. Saluting the company with dignity, he placed himself upon the wire; then giving a hand to his attendant, he was drawn to one side of the room, and, being let go, swung at ease,—beating the drum like a professional performer. He performed all the usual exploits, balancing hoops, swords, etc.—and, to crown the whole, danced what I had never seen before, a hornpipe, in superior style;—his spangled shoes, in the rapidity of his steps, producing upon me a most brilliant effect. My own imitative propensity came again into play, and I became a celebrated hornpipe-dancer before I was six years of age;—meaning by *celebrated*, such celebrity as spread through about one-third of our little village. The image of Templeman rose before me as something of another age, or another sphere when, about forty years after I had seen him swinging in such splendor on the wire, I met in Washington a well dressed gentleman-like person, somewhat corpulent, who was made

known to me as the paragon of my childish admiration, converted into a plain citizen, and an extensive dealer in city lots."

No greater wisdom or truer forecast apropos of the nation's city was ever expressed than by Mr. John Templeman, at Georgetown, January 20, 1804:

"The operation of government will continue the growth of the city; but not in any proportion equal to what would take place when commercial operations were combined with those of government."

And so you see in the earliest days they looked to Georgetown for wisdom on questions commercial; and, in these days, here, we continue to look there still.